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NOT RELEVANT
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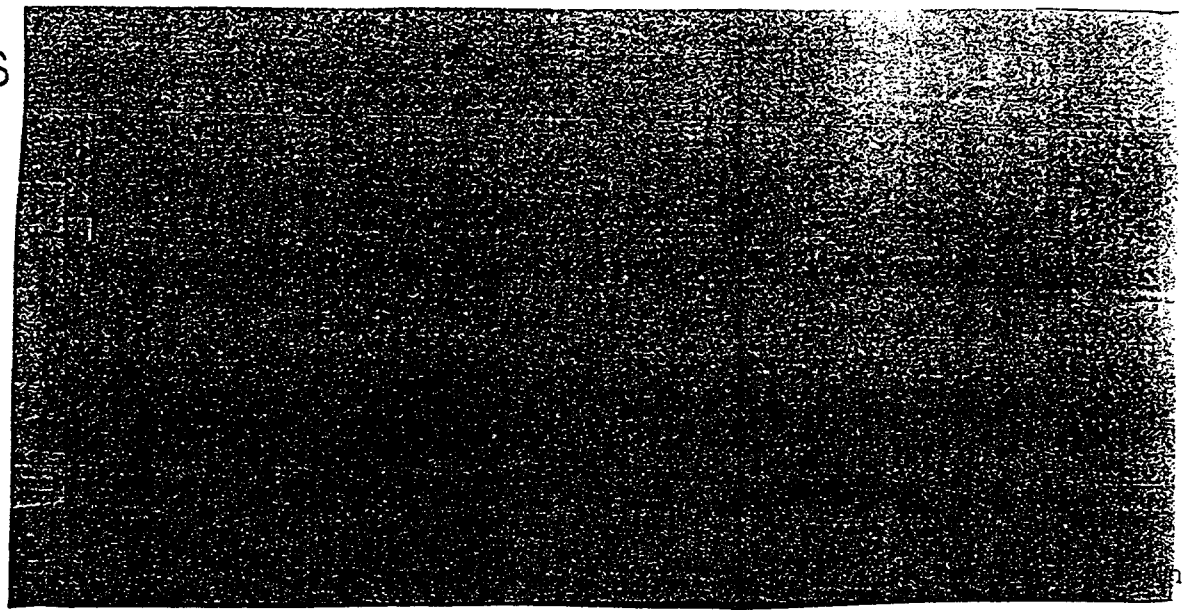

14. Venezuelan-Cuban Relations: An apparent deterioration in Venezuelan-Cuban relations could further reduce Fidel Castro's prestige in the hemisphere and even tend to isolate him with other dictatorships in the area which he has been seeking to overthrow. Venezuelan President Betancourt reportedly spoke harshly to a Cuban delegation which was in Caracas to invite Venezuela to attend Castro's conference of underdeveloped nations scheduled for Havana later this year. Betancourt told the delegation that Cuba was beginning to resemble the Dominican Republic, and he expressed lack of confidence in the Cuban leader. Leftist groups and the Communist-influenced press in Venezuela have thus far provided Castro with valuable propaganda support.

Betancourt, who sent a high-level personal emissary to Havana this month to try to influence the Cuban regime toward moderation, has stated his concern over Castro's authoritarian policies on previous occasions. A confidant of the Venezuelan President has quoted him as saying that Castro is "crazy." Last November, moreover, Betancourt personally blocked an intended visit to Caracas by Raul Castro and "Che" Guevara, Castro's top lieutenants, and forced the recall of the Cuban ambassador as an aftermath to the affair.

Public knowledge of official Venezuelan coolness toward Castro would be a blow to Communists, leftists, and extreme nationalist groups in Latin America who have lumped together the two revolutionary regimes as a symbol of anti-imperialism in order to promote anti-US sentiment and other objectives.

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Betancourt is reported under increasing pressure from his majority Democratic Action party to force the hand of and possibly oust from his three-party coalition the Democratic Republican Union party (URD)--a stanch supporter of Castro and a dissatisfied component of the coalition. He might use the issue of Cuban relations to force a showdown with the URD. [redacted]

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